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ABSTRACT

In an effort to share the good news about what can be done to increase learning and achievement for students in high poverty schools, the research has been combed to pinpoint instructional and organizational factors that lead to student success. Specifically examined were how and why some schools across the country are attaining greater than expected reading achievement with populations of students who are at risk for failure by virtue of poverty. Emphasis is on the terms "instructional" and "organizational," for a thorough reading of the research leads to the conclusion that only when both classroom level (instructional) and school level (organizational) are attended to can aspirations be met to improve literacy for all students. A review of the literature on effective teachers and schools is "surprisingly convergent." Effective teachers have excellent classroom management skills and provide scaffolded, balanced literacy instruction, often in small groups, characterized by explicit instruction in skills and strategies as well as frequent opportunities for students to read, write, and talk about text. Effective schools are typically characterized as learning, collaborative communities in which staff assume a shared responsibility for all students' learning, monitor progress as a way of planning instruction for groups and individuals, help one another learn more about the art and science of teaching, and reach out to the families they serve. (Contains 3 tables and 29 references.) (NKA)

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Introduction

We all want the best schools possible for children, schools that help them acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they will need to pursue whatever dreams and paths they wish. Yet the reality is that many children are not reading well enough to keep up with the demands of school (Campbell, Donahue, Reese, & Phillips, 1996; Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999), let alone the demands of society or their personal dreams. In the recent national report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, a National Academy of Science Committee concluded that "quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The committee recommended that the number one priority for educational research be to improve classroom reading instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades.

In addition to advocating improved classroom reading instruction, the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children discussed the importance of systematic, school-wide restructuring efforts in reading. The committee (Snow et al., 1998) recommended that poor performing schools consider reading reform efforts with a dual focus on improved classroom reading instruction *and* school-wide organizational issues.

In an effort to share the good news about what can be done to increase learning and achievement for students in high poverty schools, we have combed the research to pinpoint those instructional and organizational factors that lead to student success. Specifically, we try to

explain how and why some schools across the country are attaining greater than expected reading achievement with populations of students who are at risk for failure by virtue of poverty. We pause to emphasize the terms *instructional* and *organizational,* for it is our conclusion, based upon a thorough reading of the research, that only when we attend to both classroom level (instructional) and school level (organizational)) facets of reform that aspirations to improve literacy for all students can be met.

Effective Teachers

A great deal is known about the teaching that occurs in elementary-level classrooms that are effective in promoting literacy development. This knowledge about effective teaching is the cumulative result of a number of research efforts in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, an important type of educational research emerged. Researchers began documenting the teaching processes that occurred in classrooms. The goal was to identify processes associated with an important educational product---high achievement, often reading achievement. Hence, this came to be known as process-product approach. Some of the now well-known researchers contributing to this tradition were Brophy (1973), Dunkin and Biddle (1974), Flanders (1970), Soar and Soar (1979), and Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974).

The process-product approach reflected the commitment in the middle part of the century by educational researchers to neobehaviorism and the concomitant belief that educational outcomes (i. e., products) could be understood as a function of educational inputs (i. e., processes). The unambiguous focus was on teaching behaviors and dimensions of teaching that could be measured by direct observation (e. g., Rosenshine, 1979). Several important practices were documented as part of this effort:

- More time spent engaged in academic activity produces better performance on objective tests of academic content. High time on task occurs in classrooms emphasizing an academic focus, with direct instruction by teachers especially effective in promoting elementary reading.
- Effective, direct instruction includes making learning goals clear, asking students questions as part of monitoring their understanding of what is being covered, and providing feedback to students about their academic progress.
- Effective classrooms, however, are convivial and warm, democratic and cooperative.
- Effective classrooms are places that respect individual differences between students, for example, with more teacher instruction provided to weaker students, who are also given more time to complete tasks.

Direct instruction evolved into an approach that emphasized the development of the component skills of reading. Its advocates (e. g., Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997) were confident that mastery of such skills sums to a whole bigger than the parts, with that whole being skilled reading. Direct instruction approaches to reading emphasize sound-, letter- and word-level skills in beginning reading. Comprehension within the direct instruction model is less about constructing meaning in response to texts and more about learning vocabulary and specific comprehension skills, such as sequencing, sentence processing, summarizing, and making inferences (e. g., deciding whether the ideas in text make sense).

Gerald Duffy, Laura Roehler, and their associates (e. g., Roehler & Duffy, 1984) conducted work in the 1980s that went beyond direct instruction, emphasizing the cognitive processes involved in excellent teaching. That is, Duffy and Roehler and their colleagues emphasized teacher thinking much more than did the neobehaviorists. They also emphasized

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teaching as explanation, referring to their approach as direct explanation. What the good teacher explains are strategies that students could use for recognizing words and understanding texts. Yes, many of the strategies are remarkably similar if not identical to the skills emphasized by direct instructionists, The primary difference is that in the direct explanation model, the teacher does a lot more modeling of skill use, emphasizing to observing students her or his thinking as the skills are applied to new situations. For example, the teacher makes clear through modeling and explanation that word attack involves forming hypotheses based on knowing the sounds of the letters in words, blending those sounds, and reflecting on whether the word as sounded out makes sense in the sentence, paragraph, and passage context in which the word appears. Similarly, the effective teacher overtly models and explains comprehension by making predictions about what might be in text that she or he reads to students. The teacher also tells students about images that occur to her or him as a reader, questions that occur during reading, and the big messages that seem to emerge from the text as reading proceeds. In short, the effective teacher mentally models the strategic activity that *is* skilled reading, demonstrating for students how good readers construct meaning and respond to text. The direct explanation teacher encourages students to be active in the ways that skilled readers are active as they process texts (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Michael S. Knapp and Associates (1995) studied 140 high-poverty classrooms in California, Ohio, and Maryland, observing the teaching in these classrooms and measuring achievement. Their overarching conclusion was that effective instruction emphasized higher-order meaning making much more than lower-order skills. Achievement was higher the more that the teacher emphasized actual reading of text rather than drilling of skills. Achievement was higher the more reading and writing were integrated, the more students discussed what they were

reading, the more the teacher emphasized deep understanding rather than literal comprehension of text, and the more that discrete skills were taught in the context of actual reading rather than out of the context of reading. In short, the more the active cognitive processes and explanations that Duffy and Roehler favored occurred, the better reading seemed to be; the more that teachers emphasized using the skills taught as part of real reading and writing, the better achievement seemed to be.

In recent years, there was great attention to reading in the primary grades, with a great deal of debate about whether sound-, letter-, and word-level skills should be emphasized or focus on the reading and writing of real texts made more sense. Pressley and his colleagues in a CELA (Center on English Learning and Achievement) study (Pressley et al., in press; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998) observed grade-1 classrooms with the goal of finding out how the teaching differed in classrooms where reading and writing went well compared to classrooms where reading and writing achievement seemed less certain. They found that primary-level classrooms differed in the engagement of students in reading and writing, with the most engaged classrooms producing readers who read more complicated stories and books and wrote more coherent and complete texts. The teaching in primary-level classrooms that stimulates high literacy achievement differs from the teaching in classrooms in which achievement is more typical: There is more teaching of literacy skills, often in reaction to specific problems students encounter as students read and write real texts. Effective teachers expect and encourage their students to use the skills they learn in a self-regulated fashion, with teachers explaining to and modeling for students how to coordinate multiple strategies (e. g., attempt to recognize words by using phonics, word chunks, and semantic context clues such as accompanying pictures). Comprehension and writing strategies are taught as well, with the

consistent message that understanding and effective communications are what literacy is about, not just word recognition.

In a CIERA (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement) Beat the Odds study of effective schools and accomplished primary grade teachers (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999), it was found that the most accomplished teachers, in contrast to the least accomplished teachers, had higher pupil engagement, provided more small group instruction, had a preferred teaching style of coaching as opposed to telling (the preferred style of the least accomplished teachers), provided more coaching during reading to help children improve in word recognition, and asked more higher-level comprehension questions. In contrast to teachers in the least effective schools, teachers in the most effective schools provided more small group instruction, communicated more with parents, had children engage in more independent reading, provided more coaching during reading as a way to help children apply phonics knowledge, and asked more higher level questions.

In short, the teaching practices of excellent elementary literacy teachers seems to have taken a lesson from each period of research on effective teaching. It is consistent with the process-product framework to some extent, especially with regard to engagement, but goes beyond it in ways consistent with Duffy and Roehler's (1984) direct explanation approach and Knapp and Associates (1995) emphasis on higher-order literacy instruction (i. e., instruction emphasizing comprehension and communication). Excellent elementary literacy teachers balance skills instruction with more holistic teaching (Pressley, 1998). In the best classrooms, students are engaged much of the time in reading and writing, with the teacher monitoring student progress and encouraging continuous improvement and growth, and providing scaffolded instruction on exactly those strategies that students need to work on.

In the chart below we summarize common findings from three of the recent studies of effective teachers discussed above. We also include findings on classroom factors from two recent studies of effective schools discussed in the next section.

Table 1. Characteristics of Effective Teachers: Trends Across Recent Studies

Study→ / Feature emphasized	CELA	CIERA	Knapp	Chicago (Designs for Change)	Title I-Prospects (Puma et al)
Excellent Classroom Management	X	X			
Balanced Reading Instruction	X	X	X	X	X
Small Group Instruction	X	X			X
Higher Order Thinking	X	X	X	X	X

Effective Schools

Research on effective schools, much of which was conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s, was documented by Hoffman (1991) in a landmark paper, "Teacher and School Effects in Learning to Read" in the second volume of the *Handbook of Reading Research.* . Hoffman uncovered eight recurring attributes of effective schools :

1. a clear school mission;
2. effective instructional leadership and practices;
3. high expectations;
4. a safe, orderly, and positive environment;
5. ongoing curriculum improvement;
6. maximum use of instructional time;
7. frequent monitoring of student progress; and
8. positive home-school relationships.

Concerned specifically about high-poverty schools, Edmonds (1979) reasoned that research investigating high-achieving, high–poverty schools was needed. Studies in the 1970s of high-poverty elementary schools with high reading achievement found a) a strong emphasis on reading, b) strong leadership, c) systematic evaluation of pupil progress, and d) high expectations for students as distinguishing characteristics (Venezky & Winfield, 1979; Weber, 1971; Wilder, 1979).

For a host of reasons, research on effective schools was placed on a back burner in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In recent years, however, a revival of effective schools research has occurred, most likely due to widespread national concerns that we, as a nation, are failing to meet the needs of our poorest children. We were able to locate five large-scale studies on effective, moderate-to high-poverty elementary schools published between 1997 and 1999. What is remarkable about them is that they report strikingly similar findings, findings that both support and extend the earlier research. Details about each study are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Recent Large-Scale Studies on Effective Schools

Name	Authors	Date Published	Focus
Hope for Urban Education	Charles A Dana Center	1999	9 high-performing, high poverty schools around the country
CIERA Beating the Odds	Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole	1999	4 high performing schools compared to 10 lower performing schools
Prospects	Puma, Karweit, Price, Ricciuiti, Thompson, & Vaden-Kiernan	1997	5 high performing Title I schools selected from a pool of 400
Successful Texas School-Wide Programs	Klein, Johnson, & Ragland	1997	26 Texas Title I schools that surpassed 70% pass rate on TAAS
Chicago Schools with Substantially	Designs for Change	1998	Report on 7 Profile Schools with large achievement gains in

Improved Achievement			math and reading

Across these 5 studies 6 factors emerged consistently. These 6 factors, along with their incidence across the 5 studies, appear in Table 3.

Table 3: School level factors responsible for high achievement in high poverty schools

	Hope for Urban Ed	CIERA	Prospects	Texas Title I	Chicago
Put students first	♦	♦		♦	♦
Strong buildiing leadership	♦		♦		♦
Strong teacher collaboration	♦	♦		♦	♦
Student data	♦	♦		♦	♦
Professional development	♦	♦		♦	♦
Strong links to parents	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦

Putting the students first to improve student learning. In four of these studies improved student learning was cited as schools' overriding priority. This focus on improving student learning entailed a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement; teachers, parents, the principal, and the school staff worked together as a team to realize their goal of substantially improved student learning.

Strong building leadership. In three studies, the importance of a strong building leadership, most often in the form of leadership from the principal, was documented. The **Hope** report highlighted the role of school leadership, not necessarily limited to the principal, in terms of redirecting people's time and energy, creating a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement, getting staff the resources and training they needed, creating opportunities for collaboration, creating additional time for instruction, and helping the school persist despite

difficulties. The **Chicago** report specified that the substantially improved schools had more effective principals who served as instructional leaders, closely supervised the change process, unified the school around the mission of improved student learning, and built a strong staff by hiring carefully and providing regular coaching to help teachers improve their instruction. The **Prospects** report found that the high-performing Title 1 schools had more experienced principals than other Title 1 schools.

Strong teacher collaboration. In addition, or perhaps because of strong leadership, strong staff collaboration was highlighted in 4 of the studies. In the **Hope** study school leaders created opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together—with a focus on instructional issues. In the **CIERA** study, teachers reported a strong sense of building communication and used a collaborative model in which classroom and resource teachers worked together to maximize time for small group instruction in the primary grades. In the **Chicago** study the teachers worked more effectively as a team, especially in planning and in sharing information about students. In the **Texas** study, cross-grade as well as within-grade collaboration among teachers was highlighted. Frequently, teachers were found to work with those who taught subsequent grade levels to better understand one another's curricula and expectations.

Consistent use of data on student performance to improve learning. Four of the studies found that the effective schools systematically used student assessment data, usually on curriculum-embedded measures, to improve performance. In the **Hope** study, teachers carefully aligned instruction to standards and state or district assessments. In the **CIERA** study the most effective schools engaged in regular, systematic evaluation of pupil progress and shared this data to make instructional decisions. In the **Texas** study, schools and/or districts aligned curriculum staff development efforts with the objectives of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

Formative assessments were widely used by teachers to plan instruction. In the **Chicago** study, it was found that in the substantially improved schools, teachers carefully monitored students reading progress through observations and tests. In many of the schools, assessment data were a part of the collaborative model; teachers got together to share data and reach consensus on instructional plans for particular students.

Focus on professional development and innovation. In 4 of the studies, ongoing professional development and trying out new research-based practices was stressed. In the **Hope** study, school leaders made sure that teachers felt they had the materials and training they needed to help students achieve at high levels. In the **CIERA** study the emphasis was year-long professional development in which teachers learned together within a building. In the **Texas** study, teachers were encouraged to experiment with new ideas and to collaborate to help one another improve their instruction. Teachers at these effective schools were continually searching for new, effective ways of teaching and were described as a "community of learners." In the **Chicago** study, teachers were encouraged to try innovations, and principals provided workshops, coaching, and assistance to help teachers improve their instruction.

Strong links to parents. All 5 studies reported strong efforts within schools to reach out to parents. In the **Hope** study, the school staffs worked to win the confidence of parents and then build effective partnerships with them to support student achievement. In the **CIERA** study the most effective schools made more of an effort to reach out to parents—by involving them in an active site council, by engaging in phone or written surveys or focus groups, and by calling home just to stay in touch. In the **Prospects** study the high-performing schools reported a better school climate, better relations with the community, and more parental support. In the **Texas** study parents were regarded as part of the team effort to improve student achievement, and parents

were treated as valued members of the school family. School staff made a concerted effort to accommodate parents who did not speak English. In the **Chicago** study parents were treated with respect, participated in school events, including parent orientation sessions, and were encouraged to help children learn at home.

Conclusions

Interestingly, recent research on effective teachers and schools is surprisingly convergent . Effective teachers have excellent classroom management skills and provide scaffolded, balanced literacy instruction, often in small groups, characterized by explicit instruction in skills and strategies as well as frequent opportunities for students to read, write, and talk about text. Effective schools are typically characterized as learning, collaborative communities in which staff assume a shared responsibility for all students' learning, monitor progress as a way of planning instruction for groups and individuals, help one another learn more about the art and science of teaching, and reach out to the families they serve.

Amidst all the pressure for schools to adopt off-the shelf reform programs as a way of improving student achievement, it is interesting to note that, by and large, the schools in these studies did not necessarily view packaged reforms as the magic ingredient in improving student achievement (i. e., Hope for Urban Education, CIERA Beating the Odds, Successful Texas School-wide Programs). The common denominator seems to be commitment and hard work which focuses on the classroom-level and school-level practices consistently identified in the research as important in helping students achieve at high levels.

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